

A powder struggle in 'My Beautiful Laundrette'.

bits with an axe so that she can provide 'some good barbecue.' By this time the other guests have realised it may not be such a good idea to stick around and partake in this scatological *It's A Knockout* themselves, so they plan a daring escape. But the locals are having 'More fun than a Beagle dog on a coon hunt' and there's a rush on sharp instruments at the general stores as they set off in pursuit. Make no mistake, there's a lot

of butchery here, but unfortunately most of it has been done by the censor. All the graphic gore scenes are chopped out, leaving the discriminating horror buff very little, apart from the opportunity of seeing 'Playboy's Favourite Playmate of 1964' Connie Mason giving her best performance, and the chance to listen to some foot-tappin' tunes — 'Oh the South's gonna' rise again!' — hand me that axe Slim...

AB

MY BEAUTIFUL LAUNDRETTE/Virgin/

Saeed Jaffrey, Daniel Day Lewis/15/93 min

★★★★★

An alternative title for this film could have been *This Is England*. Its savage realism and up-front handling of contemporary moral issues (like racism and homosexuality) set against a backdrop of suburban houses and city slums hits one with a stark reality that

is seldom witnessed on celluloid. Originally filmed for Channel 4, *Laundrette* went down so well at the Edinburgh Festival that its producers decided to give it a theatrical release — a shrewd move. The London cinemas have been choc-a-block since its release and the endless flow of punters still shows no signs of abating.

Omar is a Westernised Pakistani with no job and no prospects. He lives in a run-down tenement block with his alcoholic father performing his daily chores with surprisingly little fuss. It's a grim existence, but help comes in the jovial form of uncle Nasser. Rich, affluent and generous to a fault, Nasser provides Omar with a menial job. He's a good worker and soon wins his uncle's admiration. Becoming increasingly fond of the boy Nasser keeps gracing him with more responsibilities until he eventually agrees to give him a shot at running his dilapidated laundrette. 'There's no money in it' he warns, but Omar is determined to give it a go.


Meanwhile, Omar has bumped into Johnny. A friend from years ago, the pair drifted apart when Omar discovered Johnny's affiliation with the National Front. Regretting his wasted youth Johnny agrees to help Omar renovate (and eventually co-manage) the laundrette, which they soon transform into a haven for the local dirty washing brigade.

I've only picked out the bare bones of the plot for two reasons. One, I don't want to give too much away (there are a number of shocks in store) and two, there's so much going on throughout — and so many peripheral characters — that it would take a whole page to detail a full review. In fact, reading back over this it all sounds remarkably drab, but I can assure you that *Laundrette* is infused with a wry sense of humour that successfully takes the edge off some of the more controversial scenes. Sometimes brutal, occasionally shocking, always truthful — I can't recommend it highly enough.

SS

Reviews by Neil Bailey,
Allan Bryce and Steven
Shields.





A MAN IN A HAT

.... called Harrison Ford.
Okay, so we couldn't think of
a decent title for this star
profile by Allan Bryce and the
Art Ed came up with this one.
No-one's perfect...

Harrison Ford's film career started off rather poorly. After his first picture, a studio boss took him to one side and said: 'The first time Tony Curtis was in a movie, he delivered a bag of groceries. We took one look at him and we knew he was a movie star. You, kid, just ain't got it.' But Ford wasn't dissuaded: 'When a guy delivers groceries' he told the big-wig, 'you're supposed to think he's delivering groceries, not that he's a movie star.'

It's easy to understand what the executive meant though, because Harrison Ford looked, at first glance, an unlikely contender for superstar status, and even today, after the *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* series have made him one of the most popular screen personalities in the world, he can still walk down the street without being recognised. 'I like to blend into the background, like a chameleon,' he says. 'I don't behave the way stars are supposed to behave. I don't attract attention'. He certainly doesn't live the traditional movie star life either. Despite his fantastic wealth, his home is a modest wooden chalet-style house without a swimming pool in the hills near

Los Angeles, where he and his wife, screenwriter Melissa (E.T.) Mathison live very privately. He even built a lot of his own furniture!

Born on July 13, 1942, of an Irish mother and a Russian father, Harrison Ford decided to become an actor after flunking out of Wisconsin's Ripon College in his senior year — 'A career in show business seemed a logical choice when it became clear I was going to fail academically' he stated. Then he pursued his chosen ambition by moving from New York to Hollywood, where 'it wasn't so damn cold' and picking up small appearances on television shows like *Gunsmoke*, *Ironside* and *The Virginian*. He started out as Harrison J. Ford (because there was a silent film actor with the same name), supplementing his meagre income from acting by taking on carpentry jobs for the Hollywood stars. At this time it was fair to say he made more from his woodworking skills than his bit parts in pictures like *Dead Heat On A Merry Go Round* (1966) — his first movie appearance — where he was a bell boy with one thing to say to star James Coburn: 'Paging Mr Jones! Paging Mr Jones!'

Similarly tiny roles in mediocre pictures like *Journey To Shiloh* and *The Long Ride Home* (1968) didn't gain him much recognition with movie fans, and when his only line in Antonioni's mystical 1970 production *Zabriskie Point* ended up on the cutting room floor, Ford became even more convinced that he should give up the film business and go into carpentry full time. Nevertheless he decided to stick

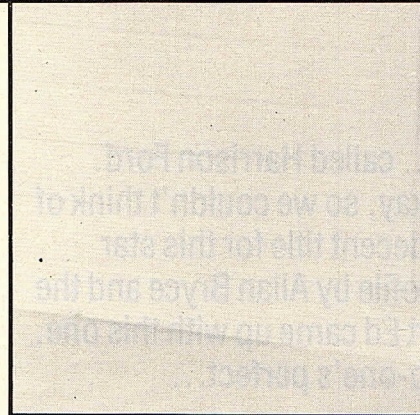


Ford and Sean Young...

it out for a little while longer. He took a tiny part in the Elliott Gould comedy *Getting Straight* (1971) before landing his first substantial role, in George Lucas' popular youth movie *American Graffiti*. He was spotted by producer Fred Roos while doing some odd-job carpentry around the Universal Studio offices and cast as Bob Falfa, the ace driver who blows into a small California town one hot night in 1962 to challenge the local top dog (Paul Le Mat) to an illegal road race.

American Graffiti was a massive commercial and critical hit, but careerwise it didn't help Ford as much as it did its more prominent stars like Richard Dreyfuss, Ron Howard and Candy Clark. Nevertheless it was a step in the right direction, and more importantly marked the beginning of the actor's association with George Lucas, the talented filmmaker who would one day help him find success on a scale he had never even dreamed about.

Though nobody at this stage had yet entertained the idea that Harrison Ford (he dropped the J. in 1970 when his silent film actor namesake died) could be star material, he did start to pick up more substantial roles in better movies, such as Francis Ford Coppola's *The Conversation* (CIC-1974). This was a tingling thriller in which Gene Hackman starred as surveillance expert Harry Caul ('the best bugger in the business') who tapes a conversation in a crowded New York park that has dreadful consequences for both himself and the people involved. Ford contributed a memorable performance, once again in a villainous mould, as Martin Stett, the chilling corporate hatchet man who seems to follow Hackman around. Then



With Kelly McGillis in 'Witness'.

came some equally meaty roles in television movies like *Dynasty* (not the famed soap opera series) opposite Stacy Keach and Sarah Miles, *The Trial of Lt. Calley* for director Stanley Kramer, and *The Possessed* (EIV) with James Farentino and Joan Hackett.

The kind of parts he was now getting were a step in the right direction, but not enough to convince him he should give up his other job. In fact he was becoming so disillusioned with his acting career that when his friend George Lucas came along to him with the offer of playing space pilot Han Solo in his ambitious *Star Wars* project he very nearly turned the part down because it paid less than he was earning making furniture! But Lucas sweetened the deal by throwing in a percentage of the profits — and when the film became the biggest money spinner of all time it made Ford wealthy enough to put down his carpentry tools forever.

The *Star Wars* (CBS/Fox-1977) phenomenon also turned him overnight into a box-office force to be reckoned with. Though Mark Hamill's Luke



Skywalker was supposedly the hero of the film there was little doubt that the public responded more to Ford's cocky space rogue, piloting his battered ship *The Millennium Falcon* through some hair-raising battles without blinking an eyelid. The critics who had previously ignored him were now comparing his acting to that of Bogart and Gary Cooper, and suddenly he could pick and choose what parts he wanted to play. There were to be no more thankless supporting roles. He was suddenly a superstar.

Unfortunately his next few roles did not help him build on his *Star Wars* popularity. As a sympathetic military man trying to track down disturbed Vietnam veteran Henry Winkler in *Heroes* (CIC) he played second fiddle to The Fonz and the talented Sally Field in an underwritten part. Then Peter (Capricorn One) Hyams' overblown romance *Hanover Street* (RCA/Columbia) saw him miscast as an American pilot stationed in wartime London embarking on a torrid affair with Lesley Anne Down. Souped up with lovely photography and a lush John Barry



score, the film seemed almost a caricature of the *Waterloo Bridge*, *Brief Encounter* type melodramas it so obviously sought to emulate. Then *Force Ten From Navarone* turned out to be a far from worthy sequel to the great British war picture of the 60s, reviving some of Alistair MacLean's characters for a new spot of Jerry bashing — this time destroying a bridge in Yugoslavia. Ford was once more landed with a colourless role as a ruthless American commando, and the film was only a modest box office success.

Better things were in store for him in a more ambitious kind of war epic: Francis Coppola's long-awaited *Apocalypse Now* (CIC) offered him a smaller part, but he made quite an impact as the chilling CIA man who briefs reluctant hero Martin Sheen on his assignment to journey into the jungle hell of Cambodia and 'terminate with extreme prejudice' the mad Marlon Brando. After this he tried his hand at comedy in the Gene Wilder romp *The Frisco Kid* (Warner), which had him as a gunfighter joining forces with a



...get closer in Ridley Scott's 'Bladerunner'.

Polish rabbi (Wilder) to help him make his way across America during the days of the gold-rush. This had its moments, and Ford's performance was suitably light and intriguing, but under Robert (*The Choirboys*) Aldrich's uncertain direction the film turned out to be a rather pointless exercise and, not surprisingly, a box office flop.

The problem with all the roles Ford had taken immediately after *Star Wars* was that none of them seemed to capture that roguish heroic charm he had brought to the character of Han Solo. He seemed in danger of fading back into obscurity if he didn't find the right part soon, and obviously realising this he signed up, albeit reluctantly, to play Solo again in *The Empire Strikes Back* (CBS/Fox 1980). The *Star Wars* sequel was predictably a mega hit, grossing almost as much as the original, and Ford was once more top of the pops as far as filmgoers were concerned. But he couldn't base his act around just one movie series if he wanted to find steady work as an actor for many years to come. He didn't want to be recognised only as Han Solo, nor did he wish to permanently play second fiddle to extravagant special effects. It was at this point that Indiana Jones came into his life.

The Empire Strikes Back had been written by Lawrence Kasdan, a newcomer whose work had impressed producer George Lucas so much that he hired him immediately afterwards to help flesh out an idea he had for a film based on the old cliffhanger movie serials he so much enjoyed as a kid. Kasdan came up with a screenplay called *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (CIC), about a bunch of Nazis hunting for the mystical Lost Ark of the Covenant, whose supernatural power will

help Hitler win the war. The only person who can save the free world is Indiana Jones, a fairly mild mannered school teacher who also happens to be one of the world's greatest adventurers and an absolute expert in archaeology — and he's no slouch with a bullwhip either! For the role of Jones, Lucas first approached rugged American actor Tom Selleck, but he had just signed up to do a series called *Magnum P.I.* and was not available for some time to come. With three weeks to go before filming was set to commence, Lucas asked Harrison Ford if he'd like the part. 'Why not?' shrugged the actor.

And so a new and even more famous character was added to Ford's repertoire. Indiana Jones became everybody's favourite screen hero when the irresistible blend of thrills, spills and humour which was *Raiders* turned out to be an instant worldwide success, grossing some 25 million dollars in its first four weeks of American release. 'It was one of the fastest films I have ever made,' said Ford, referring to the hectic 77 day shooting schedule — 'and one of the toughest! I hurt myself making that film more than any other time in my life.' Cracking that bullwhip nearly put his shoulder out once or twice, and he performed many of the movie's most dangerous stunts himself, even to the extent of sharing the floor at Pinewood studios with thousands of snakes. Jones is supposed to be mortally afraid of them, but Harrison Ford wasn't too worried — 'I quite like them. It's big spiders I can't stand' he joked afterwards.

Ironically, one of the movie's best scenes came about quite by accident on a day when the star was suffering from

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FORD

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

what could kindly be referred to as 'the trots': The crew was in the middle of shooting a wild chase through a desert bazaar, which was to climax with Jones having a spectacular sword-fight with an Arab warrior, but Ford kept having to rush off to the little boy's room, so director Steven Spielberg decided to tear a page out of the script and have Indy pull out a gun and shoot his opponent instead. It became one of those classic 'scenes you always wanted to see' and always gets a big laugh wherever the film is shown.

After *Raiders*, nobody was going to ask Harrison Ford to play a villain any more, but he did get a chance to play a different kind of hero in Ridley Scott's stunningly visual 1982 science fiction thriller *Blade Runner* (Warner). As a down at heel private detective tracking down a band of murderous artificial humans in a bleak future society, he gave his character a depth and complexity that was perfectly in keeping with the movie's thoughtful script and densely textured look. But audiences failed to respond to the erstwhile Han Solo and Indiana Jones as somebody who might be in the least bit human and fallible, and the 27 million

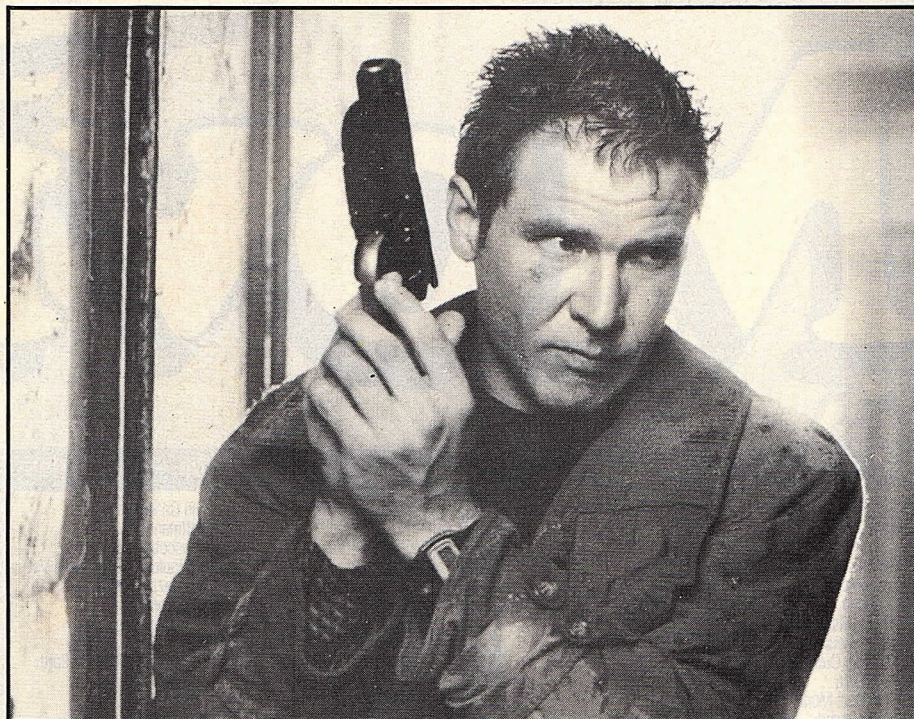


That Jones boy.

dollar production died at the box office.

After this he agreed to play Han Solo again in the third of George Lucas' *Star Wars* series, realising what would be his final commitment to the character that first made him a household name. *Return of the Jedi* (CBS/Fox-1983) was in many ways the most spectacular and satisfying of the trilogy, but it didn't offer much of a role to Ford. His character did get the girl at the end, but for most of the movie's running time was called upon to do little more than supply incidental comic relief while Mark Hamill's Luke Skywalker dominated the narrative. In fact Ford did try to persuade Lucas to make it more interesting by allowing Solo to come to a sticky end: 'The way I saw it,' said the star, 'Han Solo was very dispensable — he had no mother, no father, no history. But George didn't agree!'

He was happier to get back to his



Replicant hunter Decker.

bullwhip and battered hat and go off adventuring again in Steven Spielberg and George Lucas' *Indiana Jones And The Temple of Doom* (1984), because this spectacular sequel to *Raiders* offered him centre stage all the way through, and he felt 'much more comfortable' in the character. Like many of today's more successful sequels, *Temple of Doom* reworked all the elements that made the original such a huge hit — serving them up bigger and better! Thus in the first ten minutes Indy seems to go through more hair-raising perils than he did in the entire of the previous film. Many critics felt that this was a case of overkill, but the public didn't agree and it became an even bigger moneyspinner than the first.

His screen outings as Han Solo and Indiana Jones had made Ford a very wealthy man — he was reputed to have earned at least ten million dollars from *Temple* alone — but they didn't bring him much praise from the critics. 'I've always been reviewed as some kind of phenomenon,' he complained. 'But I've never thought "Well this is just a two-dimensional comic-book character, so I'll not have to work on it." I've always suffered greatly, worrying about what I was going to do, and doing my best.' He obviously wanted to be taken seriously as an actor, but for that to happen he had to find exactly the right role, in a film boasting neither gimmicks nor costly special effects.

He finally found what he was looking for in the script for a contemporary thriller called *Witness* (CIC). It was only his enthusiasm for the screenplay that persuaded Paramount to finance the twelve million dollar picture and hire the acclaimed Australian filmmaker Peter (Picnic At Hanging Rock) Weir to direct it. Never had the star's commitment to a movie been stronger — he even stayed on with Weir to see the editing process

through — and the result was one of the best thrillers of the 80s, which brought Harrison Ford into the limelight as an actor at last. He had scrupulously prepared for his part of tough Philadelphia detective John Book, even going to the length of attending all-night sessions with the Philadelphia police department homicide squad, and it showed on screen in a performance that most critics saw as Oscar material.

The film opens with a brutal murder in a Philadelphia train station, which is witnessed by a small boy (Lukas Haas) and his newly widowed mother (Kelly McGillis) who come from an Amish community — the Pennsylvania Dutch folk who live and dress in an 18th century manner. Ford's John Book investigates, only to discover that the killing has been committed by high members of his own department who have become involved in the drug trade. With a fellow policeman out to get him the hunter becomes the hunted and the wounded Book is forced to take refuge with mother and son in the closed Amish farming community, where a relationship develops between him and McGillis. But the killers are closing in...

Witness has shown people that there's a lot more to Harrison Ford than just action man heroics, and though he has said that he will undoubtedly do another Indiana Jones movie it seems likely that he will mainly be opting for more serious subjects in the future, now that he's proved he is capable of handling them so well. Whatever the case may be, Ford has a commonsense attitude to his profession and is not a man given to regrets. 'It's today and now that counts,' he says, 'not what was yesterday or will be tomorrow. Failures are inevitable, it's just unfortunate that they live forever — 40 feet wide, 20 feet high! That's the price in this business.' And when you're as big as Han Solo, Indiana Jones and John Book you can afford to pay it!

VW